

Gelatin at P.S. 1 and Spencer Brownstone

Some of the most interesting work around right now is being made by a fresh batch of young artists who are subsuming their individual egos to collectives such as London's BANK, the furniture-design team Lo/Tek and the Viennese group Gelatin. Gelatin, whose members are Ali Janka, Florian Reither, Tobias Urban and Wolfgang Gantner, was the hot ticket last summer (during the seasonal art-world doldrums) with "Percutaneous Delights," their show of large sculptures, often made from cheap or discarded materials, in the courtyard at P.S. 1. The group toys with its audience—sometimes with a hint of menace—in works that seem rooted in boyish, backyard hijinks and fun-house playfulness.

On Saturday afternoons, the courtyard resembled a backyard party thanks to P.S. 1's "Warm Up" series, a rotating roster of DJs that attracted the hip and

cool crowd. Visitors could lounge on, or in the shade of, Gelatin's structures while listening to music, and braver individuals could climb a precarious-looking tower of cobbled-together cabinetry (not for the acrophobic). Nearby was a sort of igloo made of stacked refrigerators, all facing inward except one. Through its door, visitors could enter the cool interior room, perfect for those dog days of summer. Another work invited visitors to don bathing suits and take a dip in a large inflated pool (which broke on at least one occasion, causing a mini flash flood in the courtyard).

The group followed that show with another "enter-active" installation at Spencer Brownstone suggestively titled "Suck and Blow." The artists transformed the gallery into a giant plastic bag that, for me, induced a state of visceral uneasiness. After signing a waiver that contained a warning to claustrophobes and asthmatics, visitors (I had the dubious pleasure of experiencing the work alone) walked through a small opening of fluttering black plastic and into a dimly lit room entirely lined with the same plastic, which turned out to be taped-together garbage bags. Somewhere in the bowels of the gallery, fans kicked on and the plastic was soon "sucked" firmly to the walls and ceiling. Then, after some minutes, they shut off, and slowly, slowly, the plastic began creeping down the wall like dripping, oily ooze. Then the

fans reversed, blowing air in and accelerating the sense of collapse as the plastic ceiling lowered and the exit became ever smaller, and then closed like a sphincter. Anxiety took hold. (It wasn't just me; gallery employees reported hearing fearful yelps on various occasions.) Was I trapped? Remembering childhood warnings against playing with plastic bags, I began to have embarrassing visions of clawing my way out in a panic. But reason reigned and the sucking fans switched on again. I calmly exited, my heart beating a little faster. Not much art has that effect.

—Stephanie Cash

Gelatin: Installation view of "Suck and Blow," 1998; at Spencer Brownstone.

